

Does the Arab Spring Serve as a Critical Juncture in the Attention and the Treatment of the Kurdish Question in the Mainstream Media in the UK and France? The Role of the Emergence of ISIS

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Abstract

This article analyses the role of the Arab Spring in media attention to, and treatment of, the Kurdish Question, which refers to the lack of a homeland for more than 40 million Kurds. The study reveals the significance of historical events in transforming Western media attention and treatment, even in relation to some of the most neglected or marginalised political communities. The research focuses on two right-leaning newspapers (*The Daily Mail* and *Le Figaro*) and two left-leaning newspapers (*The Independent* and *Le Monde*) in the UK and France to examine whether the Arab Spring acted as a critical juncture in the media attention and treatment of the Kurdish Question in terms of both volume and framing.

This study examines a ten-year period, from 2006 to 2016, using quantitative and qualitative research methods, including discourse and comparative analysis, to assess whether the Arab Spring marked a turning point in the selected British and French newspapers, taking into account their different ideological leanings. The research suggests that the Arab Spring served as a critical juncture across the examined newspapers, and that the Battle of Kobani between Kurds and ISIS, as a legacy of the Arab Spring in Syria, led to a major transformation in media attention to, and treatment of, the Kurdish Question.

Keywords: Kurdish Question in Western media, media treatment of Kurds, media attention to Kurds, Arab Spring and Kurdish Question.

Introduction

Why are media studies interested in the visibility of the **Kurdish Question** in the media? Although it is a deep-rooted conflict, why did the Kurdish Question receive different media attention and treatment after 2011? The Kurdish Question is a longstanding political conflict that emerged following the partition of the Ottoman Empire, which led to the creation of new nation-states in the Middle East. In particular, **the Sykes-Picot Agreement** in 1916 and the **Treaty of Lausanne** in 1923 established new national borders but left Kurds without a dedicated state by dividing them between modern Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey (McDowall, 2021). These agreements contributed to the political marginalisation of the Kurds by denying their basic rights, including the right to self-determination. The Kurdish Question reflects the lack of recognition afforded to Kurds and the absence of an independent homeland, along with their exposure to repressive policies in these

countries, despite their population exceeding 40 million and their sustained quest for an autonomous homeland (Öcalan, 2016).

The persistence of the Kurdish Question, even with ongoing struggles in different parts of Kurdish-inhabited regions, cannot be treated solely as a local conflict without revisiting the role of the Great Powers in the division of Kurdistan. In the post-division period, the role of Great Powers became more significant in shaping the popularity and visibility of the Kurdish Question, particularly through ways in which Western media represents it. In this case, media attention and treatment matter because both frequency and discourse profoundly impact public opinion and political decisions over time (McCombs and Valenzuela, 2020). Therefore, this study focuses on the Kurdish Question through media attention and treatment in the UK and France, given the media's power to shape perceptions of political issues. The UK and France were deliberately chosen because of their historical involvement in the partition of Kurdistan through the Sykes-Picot and Lausanne agreements and because they provide an opportunity to examine how media treated the Kurdish Question before and after the **Arab Spring** in these countries (Al-Sahlawi and Noreng, 2013).

This study therefore focuses on the role of the Arab Spring in whether it acted as a critical juncture in media attention given to and treatment of the Kurdish Question in British and French media. In this context, the connection between the Arab Spring and following events should not be analysed as an immediate causal nexus because the Arab Spring symbolises the beginning of radical regional change and a series of events that altered the political context in favour of greater visibility of the Kurdish Question over time. The series of uprisings across nations that occurred against dictators in the Middle East set the stage for the emergence of **ISIS** in Syria to overthrow the **Assad regime** (Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2022). Subsequently, the involvement of the Kurdish actors in confronting ISIS created steady international attention to the Kurdish Question. This study therefore examines the Arab Spring as a critical juncture that started a broader transformation in Western media attention to and treatment of the Kurdish Question, alongside subsequent events such as the **Battle of Kobani**, led by the rising Kurdish Freedom Forces against ISIS in Syria. More specifically, the study asks whether the Arab Spring and its subsequent events changed media attention to and treatment of the Kurdish Question in the British and French media.

Existing scholarship on similar questions tends to fall into two categories: the first category focuses on the representation of Iraqi Kurds in the media following the independence referendum and the execution of Saddam Hussein, and the second category concentrates on the representation of Syrian Kurds after the defeat of ISIS in the region.

In the first category, scholars have examined the representation of Kurds in the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan in northern Iraq (Ghafour, 2011). Ghafour (2011) focused on only three newspapers in the USA because of the close and complicated alliance of Kurdish actors and the United States from 2000 to 2010, as described by Little (2010), amid the Arab–Kurdish tension that arose from the execution of Saddam Hussein. The researcher used content analysis by measuring the frequency of specific words such as *oil*, *ethnic conflict*, *democracy*, *independence*, *Baghdad* and *Iraqi elections*, which this research also focused on, as explained in the methodology section (Azeez, 2023; Zulal, 2012). Other scholars have conducted linguistic analyses or meta-analyses of media representation of Kurds during the Kurdish referendum of independence (Mahmood,

2024; Olsson, 2019). Mahmood (2024) analysed news articles published by *BBC News*, *CNN*, *Fox News* and *Sky News* in the USA and the UK, along with *Al Jazeera* and *Rudaw* in the Middle East, examining whether there was a negative or positive portrayal of the Kurds, and examining the effect of a specific political event as a critical juncture.

Relevant to this study, Lucas Olsson (2019) analysed media approaches to Kurdish independence after the referendum in the Kurdistan region of Iraq by examining different newspapers from several countries. Focusing on why the newspapers adopted positive or negative approaches to Kurdish independence regarding the political stance of the country against Kurds, Olsson compared the news outlets based on their ideological stance. Similarly, this study also seeks to analyse how newspapers with different ideological orientations approach the Kurdish Question through their media attention and treatment of, rather than focusing directly on the political stance of the countries concerned.

In the second category, studies mostly focused on the media representation of Syrian Kurds in Western media through the lens of the emergence of ISIS in the region (see, for example, Teke, 2020). Teke (2020) focused on the years 2014–18 for the news articles published by the *BBC* and *Voice of America (VOA)*, making a comparison between past and current pictures of Syrian Kurds in Western media. In his findings, he reveals that Kurdish involvement in the fights against jihadist organisations raised the profile of Kurds in Western media. Although the present study examines news articles for a similar purpose, it also studied the holistic picture of the Kurds, primarily to analyse whether the Arab Spring created a critical juncture for different media attention to or treatment of the Kurdish Question.

Other research has mainly concentrated on the representation of Kurdish female fighters in northern Syria after the emergence of ISIS (Ahmed and Singh, 2021; Toivanen and Baser, 2016). Ahmed and Singh (2021) linguistically examined the news articles published in *The Daily Mail* in the UK and determined the battles in 2014 between Kurds and ISIS as a turning point. Unlike this present study, Ahmed and Singh's study focused on the Western view of Kurdish combatants and on whether they were portrayed as victims, glorified fighters or exotic objects. Similarly, Toivanen and Baser (2016) analysed the portrayal of Kurdish female fighters in British and French media between 2015 and 2016 to determine whether there is a masculine view in framing female combatants in media. Their research engages with the portrayal of female actors in media; however, this study is also interested in the comprehensive coverage of the Kurdish Question in the Western media. Thus, this research may entail a useful contribution to the existing literature by focusing on Western media attention to and treatment of the Kurdish Question before and after the Arab Spring, along with subsequent events.

Methodology

This research examined the media coverage of the Kurdish Question in the UK and France by analysing a period of five years before and five years after the Arab Spring and applying mixed research methods, including both qualitative and quantitative analysis within a critical juncture framework. In this context, a critical juncture refers to a major political event within a defined timeframe that may transform established patterns and conditions, creating a possible change and serving as a turning point through the subsequent

events (Sorensen, 2022). Therefore, the Arab Spring is examined to determine whether it acted as a turning point in media attention to and treatment of the Kurdish Question by comparing different time periods and newspapers with different political tendencies. The purpose of employing these different approaches is to reflect two different dimensions of media coverage: how often the Kurdish Question appeared and how Kurds were portrayed in the newspapers. Quantitative analysis is therefore employed to examine the volume of news articles, while qualitative analysis is used to examine the discourse surrounding the Kurdish Question during the five years before and after the Arab Spring.

These research methods were conducted on two right-leaning newspapers (*The Daily Mail* and *Le Figaro*) and two left-leaning newspapers (*The Independent* and *Le Monde*) in the UK and France. The ideological classification is used as an analytical category rather than a consistent political position of the examined newspapers in this study. *The Daily Mail* and *Le Figaro* are categorised as right-leaning as they represent more traditional and conservative values, while *The Independent* and *Le Monde* are considered left-leaning due to their alignment with progressive social values and civil liberties. These categories provide a framework for a comparison across ideological orientations before and after the Arab Spring, and they should not be interpreted as a complete description of the examined newspapers themselves. Besides, the different national media systems and editorial traditions, political contexts and interests may also contribute to variations in media attention to and treatment of the Kurdish Question in the British and French media.

This study first examined the years between 2006 and 2011, starting with the recognition of the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan and ending with the early Arab Spring. Subsequently, years from 2011 to 2016 were analysed, which start with the Arab Spring and end with the **PKK insurgency** in Turkey after the Battle of Kobani between ISIS and Kurds in northern Syria. These starting points and end dates were chosen because they symbolise milestones in the Kurdish Question. Details of those articles included in the study can be found in the Appendix.

Quantitative analysis

The quantitative analysis focuses on media attention, which refers to the frequency with which the Kurdish Question appears in the examined newspapers. The assessment of media attention was operationalised through the number of articles identified by searching the terms ‘Kurds’ and ‘Kurdes’ during the two periods: 2006–11 and 2011–16. Thus, media attention captures the volume of articles rather than discourse and narratives, and the counting of articles is used as an indicator of change in media attention over the determined timeframe.

This provides one form of evidence regarding whether the Arab Spring marked a critical juncture in relation to the Kurdish Question. However, some newspapers – for example, *The Independent* – do not offer search options through websites. Therefore, for *The Independent*, Google was used to search the news articles, by employing the formula ‘*kurds site:independent.co.uk*’ for the specific dates, and the first 20 news articles identified through this search were selected for the qualitative study. The results of that search were saved and included in the Appendix because Google search results are not static and may change over time. Additionally, *The Daily Mail* does not offer a search for specific dates, and *Le Figaro* does not list news articles in chronological order, although it does provide a direct number of news articles for selected dates. Consequently,

article counts were conducted manually for *The Daily Mail* and *Le Monde*, while the figures for *The Independent* were obtained from Google search.

Qualitative analysis: Discourse analysis and comparative analysis

This research employed qualitative analysis to identify changes in the media treatment of the Kurdish Question through discourse and comparative analysis. In this context, media treatment refers to how the Kurdish Question is represented in the examined articles in the selected newspapers, taking into account the impact of different ideological tendencies that may affect discourse. While media attention concerns only how frequently the Kurdish Question appeared in the examined newspapers, media treatment focuses on recurring terms, descriptions and frames to understand the changes before and after the Arab Spring. Following Edward Said's work on the construction of knowledge through Western perspectives, which deeply impacts the representation of certain groups and becomes more visible in written history, this study questions how Western media contributed to the particular representation of the Kurdish Question (Said, 1978). At the same time, this study also compared the findings across the left-right spectrum (i.e. comparing the results for *The Daily Mail* and *Le Figaro* with *The Independent* and *Le Monde*) to identify the differences in the representations of the Kurdish Question regarding diverse ideological tendencies as part of discourse analysis.

Limitations

This research also has limitations, including the use of different search methods, which leads to arbitrary sampling. Although this research aimed to analyse 50 articles from each newspaper, limited search engines and archiving caused different sampling for each newspaper. Additionally, for the French newspapers, Google Translate was used to translate news articles into English. Therefore, the quantitative and qualitative findings should be considered indicative rather than a complete representation of media attention and treatment of the examined newspapers.

Data analysis: The media coverage of the Kurdish Question

Quantitative analysis: Before and after the Arab Spring (2006–11 and 2011–16)

The quantitative analysis suggests a significant increase in media attention to the Kurdish Question after 2011 in all newspapers examined in this study. Based on the number of news articles released by selected newspapers, right-leaning newspapers appeared to devote more media attention to the Kurdish Question than left-leaning newspapers in both the UK and France. However, these findings must be interpreted as indicative data for major change rather than as an accurate numerical comparison because of differences in search engines and archiving in the selected newspapers.

According to the findings, *The Daily Mail*, a right-leaning newspaper in the UK, showed relatively limited interest in the Kurdish Question, publishing 22 articles about the Kurds before 2011 (Gaber, 2014). However, media attention is observed to increase significantly after the Arab Spring, with 2045 news articles published between 2011 and 2016. During the period surrounding the Battle of Kobani in 2014 and 2016 between ISIS and Kurdish forces, *The Daily Mail* published 1557 news articles, which indicates a substantial increase in the

number of accessible news articles concerning the Kurdish Question (see Table 1 below, which presents the quantitative analysis for all four newspapers).

The Independent, a left-leaning or centrist liberal newspaper in the UK, listed only 38 news articles between 2006 and 2011 (data received through a Google search) (Smith, 2017). However, after the Arab Spring, the number of news articles indicated a marked increase in media attention to the Kurdish Question. The data shows that *The Independent* published 218 news articles between 2011 and 2015, while media attention reached its peak during the war between ISIS and Kurds in Kobani in 2015 and 2016, generating a further 235 news articles about Kurds. *The Independent* eventually published 453 news articles related to the Kurdish Question between 2011 and 2016, indicating a notable increase in media attention after the Arab Spring.

Le Figaro, a right-leaning newspaper in France, offers more advanced search options to examine media attention to the Kurdish Question, and data suggests an increase in media attention over time (Afp, 2012). *Le Figaro* published 1313 news articles containing the key term ‘kurdes’ between 2006 and 2011 and 1419 news articles between 2011 and 2015. This study specifically searched from 2015 to 2016 and identified 830 news articles that coincided with developments during and after the Battle of Kobani. Thus, after the Arab Spring, *Le Figaro* published 2249 news articles about the Kurds, which is associated with increased media attention to the Kurdish Question.

Le Monde, a left-leaning newspaper in France, does not provide article counts directly through the search engine; therefore, the counting was done manually using the term ‘kurdes’ (Research Guides, n.d.). *Le Monde* published 845 news articles between 2006 and 2011 and 870 news articles between 2011 and 2016. During and after the Battle of Kobani

in 2014 and 2016, *Le Monde* published a further 447 news articles, bringing the total to 1317 news articles after the Arab Spring.

Table 1: The number of accessible news articles published by each newspaper examined for media attention

Newspapers	Tendency	Key term	The number of articles published in 2006–11	The number of articles published in 2011–16
The Daily Mail	Right-leaning	Kurds	22	2045
The Independent	Left-leaning	Kurds	38	453
Le Figaro	Right-leaning	Kurdes	1313	2249
Le Monde	Left-leaning	Kurdes	845	1317

Qualitative analysis: Discourse analysis and comparative analysis; Before and after the Arab Spring (2006–2011 and 2011–2016)

According to data collected in this research, the Kurdish Question was observed to rise to prominence across the selected newspapers, with a significant change in media treatment after the Arab Spring. In this analysis, the Arab Spring should not be treated as a single, uniform event, but rather as a broader series of events that includes the Battle of Kobani, which intensified interest in the Kurdish Question within British and French media.

According to the findings, *The Daily Mail* published relatively few news articles on the Kurds before 2010. Those news articles were mainly related to the oil resources of Iraqi Kurds, the Halabja Genocide committed by Saddam Hussein and the Kurdish rebels in Turkey (See Appendix, Articles 2, 8, *The Daily Mail*). Until 2012, the news articles continued to focus on the same topics. However, a shift started in 2012 with the series of events that occurred with the emergence of the Arab Spring, which directed attention to the autonomy of Syrian Kurds and the peace process with Kurds in Turkey (see Appendix Articles 21, 26, *The Daily Mail*). This research also discovered that during the Battle of Kobani, as a legacy of the Arab Spring, the media attention to and media treatment of the Kurdish Question changed on a major scale. Although the Kurdish Freedom Forces **YPG** and **YPJ** in Syria are linked with the PKK, which is considered a terrorist organisation in the USA and some European countries, Kurds increasingly shifted their international standing in media representations from being rebels or victims to war heroes and allies of the Western powers. (see Appendix, Articles 4, 18, *The Daily Mail*). The struggle of Kurdish women against reactionary dynamics in the region became another captivating focal point (see Appendix, Article 25, *The Daily Mail*).

Before the Arab Spring, *The Independent* addressed the Kurdish Question in the context of Iraqi domestic affairs, along with the Halabja Genocide, blood feuds, honour killings, criminal incidents or being separatists in Turkey (see Appendix, Articles 1, 5, 10, 13, *The Independent*). However, after the historical events discussed above, the discourse focused on the rights of Kurds and historical injustices. *The Independent* frequently employed the words autonomy, self-determination, independent Kurdistan, nationhood and references to the West's alliance with Kurds (see Appendix, Articles 22, 23, 24, 25, *The Independent*). Therefore, these findings indicate that the Arab Spring changed the discourse and the treatment of the Kurdish Question in *The Independent*.

Similarly, between 2006 and 2011, *Le Figaro* also concentrated on Kurdish oil resources, Kurds in Iraqi internal affairs and the Halabja Genocide committed by Saddam (see Appendix, Articles 1, 16, *Le Figaro*). The newspaper also focused on the conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK, characterising the PKK as a separatist organisation and covering bomb attacks in Turkey that the PKK was accused of carrying out (see Appendix, Article 15, *Le Figaro*). However, after the Arab Spring in 2011, *Le Figaro* presented a broader range of themes in the examined news articles that addressed the democratic rights of Kurds, marginalisation of Kurds and the assassination of female Kurdish activists, reflecting a significant change in the media treatment of the Kurdish Question (see Appendix, Articles 32, 36, 37, *Le Figaro*).

Finally, before 2011, *Le Monde* mainly focused on the Iraqi Kurds regarding the Halabja Genocide and the conflict between Turkey and the PKK, in which the Kurds were positioned as rebels and separatists (see

Appendix, Articles 3, 9, *Le Monde*). Although this rhetoric even appeared after 2011, *Le Monde* shifted its attention to Syrian Kurds, the marginalisation of the PKK, the unity of Kurds, the division of Kurdistan and the role of YPG and YPJ in defeating ISIS (see Appendix, Articles 32, 39, 41, *Le Monde*). This data demonstrates an evident change in the media treatment of the Kurdish Question in *Le Monde*, reflected in a broader range of representations of the Kurdish Question after the Arab Spring.

Table 2: Frequent terms most used for Kurds in the examined newspapers for media treatment

Newspapers	Frequent terms between 2006 and 2011	Frequent terms between 2011 and 2016
The Daily Mail	Oil, Iraqi Saddam, Halabja Genocide, Rebels, car attacks	Autonomy of Syrian Kurds, Kurds as an ally Kurdish freedom fighters
The Independent	Halabja Genocide, Iraqi Blood feuds, Honour killings Separatists, terrorism	Autonomy, Independent Kurdistan West's alliance with the Kurds Self-determination
Le Figaro	Halabja Genocide, Iraqi Separatists, bomb attacks PKK, terror	Syrian Kurds, democracy Self-defence, autonomy Marginalization of Kurds
Le Monde	Halabja Genocide, Iraqi Conflict between Turkey and PKK Rebels, separatists, terror	Syrian Kurds Marginalization of the PKK Unity of Kurds

Ideological approaches: Comparison between left- and right-leaning newspapers

In this section, the research analysed similarities and differences between the right-leaning *The Daily Mail* and the left-leaning *The Independent*. Between 2006 and 2011, both newspapers mostly reduced the Kurdish Question to the situation of Iraqi Kurds and their oil resources. They also published news articles about the Halabja Genocide committed by Saddam Hussein, despite the fact that Kurds were experiencing a similar tragedy in Turkey (Watch, 2018). After the Arab Spring, *The Daily Mail* focused on confronting jihadism from a right-wing perspective, and the coverage also involved the autonomy of Syrian Kurds, the alliance with

Kurds and Kurdish female fighters. Meanwhile, *The Independent*, from a left-wing perspective, covered the whole struggle for Kurdish nationhood across the four parts of Kurdistan, including the right to self-determination and the betrayal of Western powers to the Kurdish Question (see Appendix, Articles 34, 38, *The Daily Mail*; Articles 22, 23, 40, *The Independent*). However, because of time restrictions, only a relatively few news articles could be examined, and there might be positive or negative changes later on in the coverage. Nevertheless, the available data shows that both newspapers paid greater attention to the Kurdish Question after the Arab Spring, increasingly highlighting historical injustices and challenges faced by Kurds in different countries. These findings suggest that despite the major change in media treatment, newspapers framed the Kurdish Question and actors through the lens of their ideological orientation. *The Daily Mail* emphasised the war against jihadist groups, whereas *The Independent* focused on the neglected aspirations of more than 40 million Kurds in the region.

This study also analysed similarities and differences between the right-leaning *Le Figaro* and the left-leaning *Le Monde*. The findings suggest that *Le Figaro* paid more attention to the Kurdish Question than *Le Monde*. However, *Le Monde* covered the Kurdish Question more comprehensively than *Le Figaro* in terms of the demands, principles and historical context of the Kurdish struggle. Ultimately, both newspapers focused on countering jihadism. While *Le Figaro* covered issues such as the abduction of Yezidi women and the participation of French nationals in the Kurdish Unit to fight against ISIS, *Le Monde* published news articles that glorified the values and struggle of Kurdish fighters in supporting Kurdish forces against ISIS (see Appendix, Article 47, *Le Figaro*; Articles 46, 48, *Le Monde*). This data displays an evident transformation in both media attention to and treatment of the Kurdish Question, with each newspaper covering different aspects of the events based on their different ideological stances.

Thus, it suggests once more that the Arab Spring specifically acted as a critical juncture in the selected newspapers for the attention to and the treatment of the Kurdish Question. Nevertheless, ideological differences remained visible in the discourse and framing between right-leaning and left-leaning news outlets. For instance, despite undeniable changes in coverage within the right-leaning *The Daily Mail* and *Le Figaro*, the Kurdish Question was still covered through the lenses of security issues and the geopolitical effects rather than as a popular struggle for political recognition after the Arab Spring. In contrast, the left-leaning *Le Monde* and *The Independent* addressed the violation of the rights of Kurds and their long-term marginalisation comprehensively by emphasising minority rights and self-determination rather than presenting Kurds simply as rebels or terrorists.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that the Arab Spring represented a turning point in media attention to and treatment of the Kurdish Question in the British and French newspapers examined. The findings suggest that the position of the Kurdish Question in Western media has been profoundly changed by a series of events that emerged during the Arab Spring, such as the Kurdish victory over ISIS in the Battle of Kobani. The findings also indicate that the ideological orientations of the newspapers may shape the portrayal of the Kurdish Question, as reflected in the differences in framing, emphasis and recurring terms in the examined newspapers. It is evident that the struggle against jihadists repositioned the Kurds in the Western media, attracting the attention of right-wing

media through the war on jihadism while left-wing media focused on the aspirations of Kurds for greater political recognition. This study also reveals the different treatment of the Kurdish Question in Western media, despite the fact that more than 40 million Kurds have been exposed to oppressive policies in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey for more than a century without fair media treatment.

There is little doubt that Kurds in Turkey have also been fighting for fundamental human rights, such as the right to education or to practice their culture in Kurdish. However, the plight of the Kurds in Turkey received less attention in the Western media examined in this study, which may reflect selective patterns of reporting due to different geopolitical interests of the given countries, including Turkey's NATO membership and its status as a strategic Western ally in the Middle East. By contrast, the Halabja Genocide was widely covered in the news articles even at times when the Kurdish Question was not well known, which coincides with the increased animosity towards Saddam Hussein in the West. Similarly, the experiences of Iraqi and Syrian Kurds gained greater visibility in the Western media when they became targets of ISIS, which intended to spread jihadism all over the world.

In particular, the willingness of Kurdish actors to confront ISIS and their combat capabilities to win battles contributed to the increase in media attention and encouraged new representations of Kurds as allies or freedom fighters. Consequently, the rise of Syrian Kurds and the role of female freedom forces also contributed to the media visibility of other Kurds who had suffered under authoritarian regimes for decades.

Conclusion

This study examined whether the Arab Spring acted as a critical juncture in media attention and treatment of the Kurdish Question in the UK and France. This research focused on news articles published during the five years before and five years after the Arab Spring in two right-leaning newspapers (*The Daily Mail* and *Le Figaro*) and two left-leaning newspapers (*The Independent* and *Le Monde*) in both countries. The findings suggest that the Arab Spring marked a critical juncture in media attention to and treatment of the Kurdish Question across all four newspapers examined. Although the data indicates an increase in the volume of accessible news articles and substantial changes in discourse, these findings must be treated as indicative because of differences in sampling.

Following this, the findings demonstrate that right-leaning newspapers published more news articles on the Kurdish Question than left-leaning newspapers after the Arab Spring, specifically during the Battle of Kobani, which emerged as a subsequent development of the Arab Spring. While *The Daily Mail* and *Le Figaro* concentrated on the rights of Syrian Kurds and the West's alliance with Kurdish forces against jihadists, *The Independent* and *Le Monde* focused on historical injustices and the Kurdish right to self-determination. This suggests that, despite the substantial increase in the volume of news articles and the changes in discourse, the framing of the Kurdish Question still reflected the ideological leanings of the newspapers.

The findings also suggest that the right-leaning newspapers significantly increased attention to the Kurdish Question during the Battle of Kobani, which captured the attention of even the radical right in the West during the war against jihadist groups (Teke, 2020). On the other hand, the female freedom units (YPJ) and the ideological principles of Kurdish forces, such as freedom, autonomy and communality, attracted the attention

of left-leaning audiences and leaders from all over the world. As a result, left-leaning newspapers placed more emphasis on the rights of all Kurds in the four parts of Kurdistan.

In conclusion, this study indicates that major political events such as the Arab Spring may act as a turning point for unheard or marginalised groups such as Kurds in the media by increasing visibility through a different discourse, while ideological tendencies remain visible. Thus, this research hopes to contribute to the broader literature on media coverage of marginalised communities, revealing the power of major political events that may change their visibility and framing in the Western media.

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Glossary

The Sykes-Picot Agreement: A secret agreement between Britain and France in 1916 to partition the territories of the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East, with the consent of Imperial Russia. The agreement is also associated with the division of Kurdish-inhabited territories in different nation-states.

Treaty of Lausanne: An international agreement signed in 1923 to settle peace between the Ottoman Empire and the Allied Powers following WWI. This treaty established the borders of modern Turkey and excluded the aspirations of Kurds in Kurdish-inhabited regions.

Assad Regime: The ruling system founded by Hafez al-Assad in 1970 in Syria and succeeded by Bashar al-Assad from 2000 until the collapse of the regime in December 2024. The Assad Regime was known for the repression of political opposition and the restriction of Kurdish identity and rights as well.

Kurdish Question: It refers to the longstanding political issue concerning the territorial, cultural, and human rights of Kurdish people across Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria.

PKK Insurgency: The armed conflict between the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and the Turkish state that began in 1984. Although the PKK is designated as a terrorist group by Turkey and the US, the PKK has gained significant support among Kurdish people. The PKK also promotes principles such as democratic confederalism, women’s liberation, social ecology, and democratic autonomy.

Arab Spring: A series of protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions across the Middle East and North Africa began in December 2010. The Arab Spring emerged in response to political repression, a lack of freedoms, and rights and poor living conditions which led to removal of several dictatorships and outbreak of the civil war in 2011 and emergence of the ISIS in Syria in 2013.

ISIS: A jihadist military organisation, which is also known as ISIL or Da’esh, emerged in Iraq and expanded into Syria in 2013. ISIS declared a caliphate in 2014 and committed atrocities and genocide, particularly

against Yazidis. ISIS was territorially defeated by an international coalition led by the US and Kurdish Freedom Forces in Syria.

YPG: (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel): A Kurdish-led armed organisation established in Syria that played a central role in confronting and defeating ISIS in Syria, and became a leading component of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

YPJ: (Yekîneyên Parastina Jin): A Kurdish women's armed unit established in Syria in 2013 and associated with the YPG, which played a significant role in fighting ISIS, particularly during the defense of Kobani. The YPJ is also known for its strong commitment to women's participation, gender equality, political empowerment, and an ecologically sustainable way of life.

Battle of Kobani: A major battle fought against ISIS during the Syrian Civil War in 2014-2015. The Kurdish Freedom Forces, particularly the YPG and YPJ, defended the city of Kobani with the support of the international coalition. The battle became a symbol of Kurdish resistance and marked a turning point in the fight against ISIS.

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